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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

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DATE: January 26, 1979

SUBJECT : Politics and Human Rights

PARTICIPANTS: Mr. Robert Cox, Editor of the Buenos Aires Herald  
Mr. F. Allen Harris, Politican Officer  
American Embassy, Buenos Aires

COPIES TO : ARA/ECA - Mr. Brayshaw AMB  
HA/HR - Mr. Flood DCM  
INR/RAR - Mr. Buchanan POL/R  
ARA - Mr. Lister POL ✓  
INR/OIL/NFAC/ USICA  
ORPA/LAD - Mr. Gresham ECOM  
DAO  
CONS

Is Martinez de Hoz Willing to Step Down?

Mr. Cox mentioned that he had recently met with Economy Minister Martinez de Hoz. During their discussion of the economy, Martinez de Hoz spoke about the pressures against his economic program and himself. Martinez de Hoz told Cox that he continued to have the strong personal support of President Videla for the economic program. However, Martinez de Hoz noted the strong and growing pressures against the Videla Presidency and said that he might be asked to step down from his post as a political gesture to maintain the Videla Presidency. Cox commented that Martinez de Hoz said he was prepared to do this, if necessary, to support the Videla Presidency. (COMMENT: The Buenos Aires Herald has been an unequivocal supporter of the present economic plan.)

The Holmberg Case: Unidentified Bodies

Mr. Cox noted that the handling of the recent reappearance in the Lujan River of the body of Argentine Foreign Service Officer, Elena Holmberg was an example of the cavalier acceptance and quick disposal of bodies by the Argentine police. According to family reports, a member of

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Drafting Office and Officer

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ARGENTINA PROJECT (S200000044)  
U.S. DEPT. OF STATE, A/RPS/TPS  
Margaret P. Grafeld, Director  
☒ Release ☐ Excise ☐ Deny  
Exemption(s):  
Declassify: ☐ In Part ☒ In Full  
☐ Classify as ☐ Extend as ☐ Downgrade to  
Date ☐ Declassify on Reason

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the Lanusse family (related to the Holmbergs) was rowing in the Lujan River when the body of a woman was found. He passed this information on to the Holmberg family, who made an inquiry with the local police authorities. The police denied that any cadavers had been found in the river. The family became suspicious and brought pressure on the local police, which led to a judicial order to produce the body. The local police dug up the body of another person taken from the river, a male, for inspection by the Holmberg family. When Judge Marquardt learned of this, he ordered the detention of 17 or so individuals involved with the discovery and burial of the bodies. The woman's body was then produced which was determined by a forensic expert to be the cadaver of Miss Holmberg.

Mr. Cox emphasized that this grizzly story indicated the lack of investigation by police authorities when they find cadavers. The bodies are presumed to be victims of anti-subversive actions and are promptly buried in unnamed graves with no more than a cursory attempt to identify the bodies. At most, fingerprints are taken from the corpses and sent to Buenos Aires or La Plata for identification.

#### Political Rumors

Cox reeled off a number of current political rumors, indicating the ascendancy and decline of all the various factions within the armed forces. He opined that the variety of the stories indicated that Argentina was probably in for a period of political stability under its current leadership for at least the next year.

CLEARANCES:  
DCM: MChaplin  
POLCOUNS: WHHallman

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